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BEAT THE DEVIL.

The C.I.A.'s Master Plan

June was a bad month for Reaganite disinformation because the Colombians made their embarrassing claims while the trial of Mehmet Ali Agca and the accompanying commotion in Italy were raising unwelcome suspicions about Agca's coaching by agents from Italian military intelligence, themselves associated with Michael Ledeen and kindred artificers of the Reaganite view of terrorism. That view is best expressed in Claire Sterling's book *The Terror Network* and Arnaud de Borchgrave and Robert Moss's novel, *The Spike*.

It would not be unfair to say that these two volumes prompted the vision of the Soviet Union espoused by Reagan and his first Secretary of State, Alexander Haig. The central proposition was that the Soviet Union, through the Fifth Directorate of the K.G.B., was coordinating all terror and subversion against the Free World and, through agents-in-place in the media of the advanced capitalist countries, was successfully waging a disinformation war, whose chief victims were the newspaper-reading and television-watching citizens of the United States.

The origin of this fantasy is instructive, because it neatly illustrates the essence of successful disinformation (and of all successful rumor), which is that it is self-perpetuating and closed-ended, immune to all rules of evidence and refutation.

Among those who fled Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring of 1968 was a hard-line officer named Maj. Gen. Jan Sejna. Sejna went west in March 1968 and was soon in America earning a living by being debriefed by the C.I.A. After a few years of disclosures from Sejna, agency case officers began to surmise that he was telling more than he knew. Their suspicions were aroused when Sejna claimed that the K.G.B. had sleeper saboteurs all over Europe and were capable of detonating infernal devices in the London underground at any moment. The C.I.A. men then prepared a test. They showed Sejna a document outlining the Fifth Directorate's master plan for world domination and disinformation (which I will hereafter refer to as M.P.W.D.D.) and asked Sejna to verify its authenticity. Sejna said, Yes, indeed, it's all true, how funny that it slipped my mind, etc. The C.I.A. men didn't say anything, but since they had concocted the document, they soon eased Sejna off the payroll.

This was by no means the end of the master plan; indeed, its active service was only just beginning. Sejna went to Europe and started to talk to intelligence services and other interested parties about the plan the C.I.A. men had shown him, saying that the agency had evidence that the K.G.B. was linked to the Baader-Meinhof Gang, the Italian Red Brigades, the Japanese Red Army and so forth. The French and Italian intelligence agencies further disseminated the C.I.A. fantasy, and in the course of its peregrinations it reached Claire Sterling. Blended in with disinformation from the Mossad and other agencies it seems to have reached Arnaud de Borchgrave too.

In the climactic chapter of his career at *Newsweek* in 1978, de Borchgrave rushed back to New York from Europe on the Concorde and brandished under the nose of the magazine's editor, Ed Kosner, his great scoop about the K.G.B.'s M.P.W.D.D. Kosner brooded over the story for a while and then asked de Borchgrave to refund the price of the Concorde ticket. De Borchgrave departed from *Newsweek* not long thereafter, following negotiations which, it was hoped, would deter him from claiming that by its act of suppression *Newsweek* had revealed itself as an active component in the M.P.W.D.D. Last January, responding in *The Washington Times* to a critical review of a novel by his friend Robert Moss (by John Podhoretz of all people), de Borchgrave wrote:

> As *Newsweek*'s chief foreign correspondent I had a number of major exclusive stories about Soviet activities that were spiked by ideologically-motivated editors. The most important of these was a secret French intelligence report dated May 11, 1978, documenting in great detail links between the K.G.B. and its proxy services, on the one hand, and international terrorist groups on the other.

When Alexander Haig became Secretary of State he remarked to his subordinates that the reports of K.G.B. activities he was reading from the C.I.A. and State Department intelligence were markedly inferior to the revelations of Sterling. With a certain amount of hemming and hawing, the intelligence officials told Haig that it seemed likely that *The Terror Network* may have owed something to a document concocted by the C.I.A. to test the veracity of General Sejna.

While de Borchgrave and Moss were busily turning an M.P.W.D.D. to profitable account in *The Spike*, and Sterling was promulgating her Network, Ledeen, another high roller of the Reagan years, was commissioned by SISMI, Italian military intelligence, to do some papers on international terrorism [see "Beat the Devil," July 6/13].

In the July 10-23 issue of *In These Times*, that newspaper's European correspondent, Diana Johnstone, using testimony given to the commission investigating the Italian P-2 scandal, described how SISMI's head, Gen. Guiseppe Santovito, had bought two Ledeen papers on "international terrorism" and passed them along to the Italian government as the fruits of SISMI's own investigations.

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These studies, in SISMI regalia, were then leaked, and "right-wing journalists . . . [including, Johnstone suggests, Claire Sterling] could point to them as confirmation from 'Italian intelligence sources' of their worst suspicions about Soviet support of terrorism."

Ledeen was named though not charged in the indictment of SISMI officials for crimes including the leaking of such documents, and two weeks ago Santovito's deputy Pietro Musumeci was convicted in this matter. In two extremely interesting articles in *The Wall Street Journal* on August 7 and 8, Jonathan Kwitny discussed the deeds and connections of SISMI agent Francesco Pazienza—charged, *inter alia*, with framing the left for the crimes of the right—and showed how both de Borchgrave and Ledeen depended on him for information. Sterling denied to Kwitny Pazienza's detailed recollection of an encounter, though she did admit to having met General Santovito. Ledeen also conceded to Kwitny that a consulting firm he owned "may" have got $100,000 from SISMI in 1980 or 1981. As the Agca trial lurches on, it is increasingly clear that the "terror network" was essentially the rumor mill of a few Western propagandists talking to one another about a fantasy concocted by the C.I.A.

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